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SUBJECT: JANUARY 18 MFA PRESS BRIEFING: A/S HILL'S DPRK
TALKS, ATHENS BOMBING, HU TO AFRICA, NEW BISHOP ORDINATION,
JAPAN'S MILITARY, HOSTAGES IN NIGERIA, VISITS

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¶1. Key points made at the January 18 MFA press conference were:

-- China welcomes the meeting between Assistant Secretary Hill and DPRK nuclear envoy Kim Kye-Gwan in Berlin and supports direct contact between the sides.

-- The MFA confirmed A/S Hill's planned visit to Beijing "in the coming days" for discussion on the Six-Party Talks but offered no details.

-- China has seen no proof that the missile fired on the American Embassy in Athens was Chinese-made.

-- President Hu plans to visit Sudan, South Africa and six other African countries soon, but no further information was provided.

-- The spokesman deflected a question about the reported joint confirmation by China and the Vatican of a Catholic bishop in Guangzhou.

-- China has expressed its strong dissatisfaction regarding Japan's recent military steps.

-- Foreign Ministers of Estonia and the ROK will visit China next week. State Councilor Hua Jianmin will attend the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland and visit Austria and Greece January 24 - February 2.

US-DPRK Meeting in Berlin, A/S Hill to Beijing

¶2. MFA Spokesman Liu Jianchao said in the regular January 18 press briefing that China welcomes news of the meeting between EAP Assistant Secretary Hill and DPRK nuclear envoy Kim Kye-Gwan in Berlin and supports direct contact between the parties. China seeks to promote resumption of the Six-Party Talks at an early date and will maintain close contact with all parties involved.

¶3. Liu confirmed that A/S Hill will visit Beijing "in the coming days" for discussions to push forward the Six-Party Talks. Liu declined to give further details on Hill's visit,

saying only that specifics were still under consideration.

Athens Embassy Missile Not Chinese-Made?

14. Reporters asked Liu if there will be an investigation into reports that the missile used to attack the American Embassy in Greece recently was made in China and asked what actions China is taking to ensure weapons from its past arms sales do not fall into terrorist hands. Liu responded that China has not received proof that the missile was manufactured in China and observed that the international weapons market is "complex." China only sells arms to sovereign countries and requires that buyers do not transfer the weapons without Chinese consent.

Hu to Visit 8 African Nations, Including Sudan

15. Liu confirms that President Hu Jintao will visit Sudan, South Africa and six other African countries soon. Further announcements will be made as plans are confirmed in the near future.

New Guangzhou Bishop Approved Vatican?

16. Liu deflected a request to confirm Hong Kong media reports that China and the Vatican jointly approved ordination of a bishop in Guangzhou. China's position on the issue has not changed, Liu said. China remains willing to establish normal state-to-state relations with the Vatican as long as the Vatican agrees to recognize the People's Republic of China as the government of the only China in the world and to refrain from interfering in China's internal affairs.

Concern About Recent Japanese Military Push

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17. Asked to comment on recent steps by Japan to increase its military presence and Japan's support for the EU ban on arms sales to China, Liu said China has noted Japan's actions, which have caused concern among its neighbors. China has expressed its strong dissatisfaction through diplomatic channels and hopes Japan will develop peacefully and make greater efforts to improve bilateral relations with China instead of inciting trouble.

Chinese Hostages in Nigeria Released

18. Liu said China was pleased by reports that five Chinese engineers taken hostage January 5 were released yesterday. Asked if a ransom was paid for their release, Liu declined to provide specifics of "the process."

Rumored Visits of IMF President, Former PM Thaksin

19. Asked to confirm that former Thai Prime Minister Thaksin was in China, Liu said he had no information. The spokesman had no information for reporters asking about a planned visit by the president of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Visits: Estonian, ROK FMs; Hua Jianmin to Europe

110. Estonian Foreign Minister Urmas Paet will pay an official visit to China January 23-26, and Foreign Minister Song Min-soon of Korea will visit January 25-27, both at the invitation of FM Li Zhaoxing. State Councilor Hua Jianmin will travel to Europe January 24 - February 2. Hua will attend the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland and pay visits to Austria and Greece.

